

B. SITE HISTORY AND ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES

PCBs are a hazardous substance and probable human carcinogen. The landfill contains an estimated 208,000 cubic yards of PCB-contaminated residuals, consisting predominantly of mineral matter in the form of gray clay. The PCB waste was generated at the Plainwell Paper Mill and disposed of by the past owners and operators of the mill in a low lying wetland area, which is now the landfill. From 1955 to 1981, the landfill was used for disposal of residuals from the paper mill.

Once the PCB-contaminated residuals were dumped, they could flow unrestricted out into the woodland, wetlands, adjacent property, former powerhouse discharge channel, and the Kalamazoo River. RI activities and site reconnaissance indicate that this waste entered the former powerhouse discharge channel, wetlands, woodland, and the adjacent property to the west. Historical photography does not show any evidence of containment.

In 1970 the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) conducted a routine surface water and biota sampling at the mouth of the Kalamazoo River. The results of this investigation indicated that PCBs in the river were being discharged into Lake Michigan. A biological survey conducted by the MDEQ in 1971, pursuant to a federal Water Pollution Control Act (WPCA) program to monitor tributaries of Lake Michigan, confirmed that PCBs in the Kalamazoo River were discharging to Lake Michigan and were bioavailable.

PCBs are an oily liquid, clear to light yellow in color, and have no smell or taste. PCBs are a hazardous substance, are carcinogenic in animals, and a probable human carcinogen. Characteristics of PCBs that cause them to be especially persistent in the environment are that they bind strongly to soils, do not dissolve well in water, are not easily broken down, and are lipophilic and therefore have an affinity for the fatty tissue of biota. These characteristics cause PCBs to bioaccumulate.

A search conducted in 1990 identified three PRPs for the PCB contamination: H.M. Holdings, Inc. (now known as Millennium Holdings, Inc./Allied Paper, Inc.), Georgia-Pacific Corporation, and Simpson Plainwell Paper Company (now known as Plainwell Paper, Inc.). These PRPs were notified of their status as potentially liable parties on June 23, 1990. In 1994, the James River Corporation (now known as Fort James Corporation) was added as a PRP. These four parties have been identified as PRPs due to past paper mill operations involving the recycling and deinking of office waste paper that included carbonless copy paper during the period from 1957 to at least 1971. During this time PCB-contaminated paper residuals were discharged directly to Portage Creek and the Kalamazoo River. The PRPs also disposed of large quantities of PCB-contaminated paper residuals in five disposal areas and several lagoons that subsequently released the residuals to Portage Creek and the Kalamazoo River.

On December 28, 1990, the PRPs signed an Administrative Order by Consent (AOC) with the state of Michigan and agreed to fund and conduct the RI/Feasibility Study (FS) for the Site, including the 12th St.-OU4. The RI/FS for the 12th St.-OU4 was initiated in July 1993, and completed in July 1997. The RI/FS reports, as well as all other appropriate data and materials, have been placed in the Administrative Record.

The Michigan Paper Company originally founded the Plainwell Paper Mill in 1886. Hamilton Paper purchased the mill in 1956 and named it the Michigan Division. Weyerhaeuser acquired the company in 1961 and operated the mill through the 1960s. Nicolet Paper Company was the owner from 1971-1975, and the mill became known as the Plainwell Paper Company. The mill retained the name Plainwell Paper Company under ownership by Philip Morris, Inc. and Philip Morris Industrial, Inc. from 1975 through 1984. The mill was then purchased by the Chesapeake Corporation in 1985. In late 1987, Simpson Paper Company purchased the mill and it became the Simpson Plainwell Paper Company. In 1998, the Simpson Plainwell Paper Company was merged into Plainwell Paper, Inc.